

Section 1 – Play Types.

Duncombe (2019) suggests the promotion of physical development and activity from an early age is paramount to encouraging children’s positive attitude toward personal health throughout their life. They propose that effective physical activity that can foster interaction with others, a drive to master movement abilities, encourages creativity and a sense of pride in achievement is fundamental to achieving physical literacy.

Pellegrini (2009) has described locomotor play as a form that requires an increased level of exercise and movement. The locomotor play portrays a sense of fun and enjoyment and can enhance strengths from each aspect of a child’s holistic development. Play in this manner can be diverse, with a wide range of varying dimensions. It can be carried out alone or with others, and inspires self-directed play or with adult involvement. Play Scotland (2023) and Reference (2020) identified locomotor play as a vigorous activity where the body is required to move from one location to another. This type of play can blend with other forms of play, such as fantasy play, where children can play superheroes and other characters they are interested in, assign roles and the possibilities are endless which enhances creative and exploration development (NDNA, 2021).

The role of the adult in locomotor play can entail modelling this method of play by offering new games and activities to widen the variation and nurture children’s holistic development. One example of a game could be “What’s the time Mr Wolf?”. This game entails factors of locomotor play, such as walking, running, and chasing, which challenge cardiovascular endurance. It requires children to interact with each other by asking and answering questions and deciding who will be the wolf. It also can introduce mathematical language and development through needing to regulate their steps to the time in hours which can regulate behaviour through the structure. The success of beating the wolf or the wolf successfully catching a child endorses a sense of achievement and gratification in children or motivation to self-improve their abilities. Additionally, the development of concentration and listening skills attained through this game can be an essential tool for future learning (Llucbert, 2022).

According to Huleatt (2012), the term “heuristic” has been adapted from the term “eureka!” which symbolizes the determination in children to achieve new understanding by discovering how objects and materials can operate. This method is another play where duration and opportunities are endless. Children can be seen to be engaged in heuristic play for prolonged periods with a range of resources that stimulate the senses, where children can explore new ideas and direct their play with minimal adult guidance.

Nutbrown (2011) advises that heuristic play should be offered as continuous provision and children’s approaches to this play can be universal. It is an aspect that can be enhanced by providing a range of new materials to challenge curiosity and discovery and extend learning. The heuristic play was first introduced by Goldschmied and Jackson, who endorse this as beneficial for active individuals who wish to experiment with how objects can be manipulated and how the properties of objects change. They suggest that children’s interests can be observed through their behaviours towards these objects and can allow practitioners to plan what further provision can be offered to facilitate individual interests.

The theory of schematic behaviours was explored by Piaget (1896-1980), who discussed the different ways he observed children manipulate objects to achieve a deeper understanding of the world around them. The key concepts that surround his theory were that schemas and interests can evolve and adapt with each individual as further provision is offered, allowing the child to integrate new information with what they have previously learned which broadens their critical thinking and expands their cognitive development (Bradbury and Swailes, 2022).

Williams (2020) has highlighted the advantages of heuristic play in challenging areas of holistic development, one is beginning to understand mathematical concepts by discovering which shapes of objects can fit into others, which can stand or be rolled or which can be used to place on top to create towers. Many of the schemas that they have shared that children behave towards objects are beneficial for developing fine and gross motor skills, such as posting and transporting which are essential for supporting physical development. Objects can be used during imaginative play where children can interact with each other and discuss what objects

will be used for in their games, thus promoting communication and creative development. It also encourages independence and behaviour regulation through selecting their play which develops confidence and emotional well-being.

Section 2 – The importance of Self Directed play.

The Welsh Government (2014) were the first nation to legislate play as a valuable component in securing happy, healthy, confident and skilled individuals citizens in society. They advise that play should be self-directed and should inspire natural motivation and drive to extend their learning and should simply be enjoyed in the moment and without any planned goals to be achieved.

According to Educa (2017), the fifth strand of New Zealand's Te Whāriki curriculum is exploration, which defines play as investigating their natural curiosity about the environment that surrounds them, and that it should be perceived as significant education for young children's learning and development. Both the Te Whariki and the Welsh Curriculum (2022) advocate for self-directed play as it supports children in discovering themselves as individuals, and how their minds and bodies operate through the conceptualisation of ideas. Bruce is a strong advocate for self-directed play where the child requires the freedom to select their methods of play as it aids children's emotional and behavioural balance through directing their learning and developing confidence in their capabilities (Bradbury and Swailes, 2022).

The viewpoint of Bottrill (2018) on Malaguzzi's 100 languages is that practitioners should be more confident and trusting in what children's capabilities are and what they are able to achieve by themselves through play. They should enable children to tailor their own curriculum through listening and observing interests and sharing ideas in a way that all children have a voice and feel they are contributors to the education they receive. This models respect which is vital to be shared among each other, towards practitioners and towards the community in which they live.

Stagnitti and Cooper (2009) have highlighted play as a catalyst in supporting children's holistic development, where they can learn new skills and strengthen their abilities, confidence, and resilience. When a child is anxious or withdrawn and not wishing to play this is a cause for concern of mental ill-health and for the individual's overall outcomes. The significance of play therapy was first introduced by Sigmund Freud (1856-1939) who discovered that play was an effective method in supporting children who have experienced traumatic events beneficial in helping children learn to express themselves and explore their feelings and work through them in a safe environment and without constraints or pressures (Conkbayir and Pascal, 2014). According to Anna Freud's National Centre for Children and Families (2023) children that receive play therapy develop relationships more efficiently with others and become more resilient in overcoming challenges. The results of play therapy have also seen a decrease in anxiety and an increase in confidence which adopts a readiness to learn and develop. PsychCentral (2021) has described sand trays as an effective method of therapy in young children, particularly for those who are unable to communicate verbally about their feelings or are experiencing a developmental delay. Therapists can analyze children's feelings and memories through the objects they use that symbolize their thoughts. This can allow therapists to encourage communication and help Children reflect on their play and work through difficult feelings in a safe and relaxed environment and supports the development of learning about and being comfortable with themselves as individuals.

Although the self-directed form of play is essential to aid learning, adults still play a significant role. Lev Vygotsky's zone of proximal development suggests that adults prepare the environment and provide the resources, and understand the abilities of individual children so they know when to be involved in problem-solving and decision-making when required. He suggested that carrying this out will limit interference in play and support children's confidence in their work (Aubrey and Riley, 2022).

Howard and Mccinnes (2011) have discovered that concepts of pedagogy can vary among practitioners, therefore the ones that should teach practitioners about the play or playful learning are the children themselves. Adults should observe the playfulness and behaviours that children display from activities, as well as search for the play they expect to observe. They recommend that

settings that perform the best practice to support the learning and development of individuals are the ones that are aware of the balance of adult-directed and child-initiated activities they provide. Adult-directed activities are those in that adults provide and ask the open-ended questions required to extend learning. The attitudes of children change from what they perceive as work and what is play. They have explored a connection in the rise of capabilities of children in learning through independence, confidence, and freedom during child-initiate activities, where an adult is monitoring from afar and contributing support when required than when adults are actively involved in the activity itself. Fisher’s approach to adult-led learning expands learning through methods that may require support for discovering and understanding concepts that they may not achieve through free play. Although adults have desirable outcomes for activities, they should ensure that they are flexible to meet individual children’s rate of development, with purpose and challenge children’s critical thinking (Bradbury and Swailes, 2022).

Section 3 – The Foundation Phase Profile.

The Foundation Phase Profile (2017) is an instrument used nationwide in Wales as a baseline to assess children’s knowledge, skill, and understanding as they develop through the foundation phase. The aim of the profile is it offers a detailed list of skills that encompasses every area of learning and meets the four purposes of the curriculum to support children’s holistic development and can be easily observed within the timescale. A skill ladder is included so that assessments can be compared upon entry and exit of the foundation phase to monitor the progression of children’s development as they grow. This method aids practitioners in effectively planning activities and the environment with the continuous and enhanced provision that motivates and stimulates children to demonstrate skills they have attained. It encourages self-initiated play as well as an adult-directed play where detailed observations can be made as evidence of achievement through children’s natural behaviour and interactions with others through play. It can take several years for additional learning needs to be recognized and supported, therefore a detailed assessment tool such as this can explore any developmental delays in Children. Any areas where they have achieved a low level on the skill ladder

in certain areas can be brought to the attention of practitioners to be able to set targets, therefore creating a personalized plan that is centred around the child. This method of assessment through observation can help practitioners reflect on how the environment supports children's learning and adjust activities to meet children's interests and needs. Using a clear profile like this is easily accessed and shared between practitioners and parents and strengthens partnerships where concerns are addressed and targets can be placed to support children's outcomes. Welsh Governments Foundation Phase Profile's frequently asked questions (2017) have stated that electronic and paper-based documents of assessment are offered has been made accessible to all schools, allowing practitioners to choose which is an easier approach for them.

As children are required to be assessed using the Foundation Phase Profile within the first six weeks of entering the foundation phase, this can raise several limitations, one being the age of children. British Government's Website (no date) has declared that the age requirement of children for admission to reception year is if they turn 5 years old between the 1st of September and the 31st of August the following year. This means that some children could be 11 months older than their peers. Comparing this with the Schedule of Growing Skills (2021), which is a screening tool where the development is measured against their current age in months, the demand for the foundation phase profile being required to be completed at this time means that younger children are being compared with children who are older and can result in inequalities of outcomes. Welsh Government's Evaluation of Staffing (2014) found that the adult-to-child ratios have improved and that there has been a rise in the number of qualified practitioners, however, it could still be a challenge when considering the other duties and responsibilities they have in providing care for children to be assessing this scale with time constraints for a large number of children. This could also mean that it may not be enough sufficient time to get to know and understand the child and to carry out valid observations on each section of the profile.

Practitioners may be required to rely heavily on information shared from a previous setting or from parents to carry out the assessment which can result in mixed information and inaccurate outcomes. According to Dunlop and Fabian (2007), every period that a child enters a new setting or a class can be challenging and distressing for individuals and can affect their engagement in

learning. The Welsh Governments Foundation Phase Profile's frequently asked questions (2017) have answered that it would not be appropriate to assess children's development before they enter reception class as many children may not have attended any early years settings to receive an equal assessment. This raises a concern about these children potentially not having developed the resilience to transition that others have. These individuals require time to settle and feel relaxed in their new surroundings, therefore some children may be displaying different emotional and behaviour patterns and require longer for accurate assessments to be made and certain skills that they have already attained may not be demonstrated during observations. Absenteeism is another concern regarding the ethics of assessment. The Children's Hospital of Philadelphia (2022) has indicated that as children begin school, they are placed in an environment with lots of other children which introduces an increase in the spread of germs and illness during this period. This can lead to absences in individuals and can cause limited observations gathered and incomplete assessments.

Section 4 – The Role of Play in Observation and Assessment.

Jean-Jacques Rousseau (1712-78) strongly recommends using play as a method of observing and assessing development in young children. Supporting the environment and providing resources as being rich in developing knowledge and understanding through self-directed play and challenging learning opportunities without performance demands. Play is an accurate reflection of how children can demonstrate what they are interested in and what they have learned at their own pace and where adults can gain a true assessment of their developmental level. They believe that there shouldn't be comparisons made between Children and that every developmental progress should be recorded and celebrated, to promote self-esteem (Conkbayir and Pascal, 2014). Froebel supports this theory by elaborating on the importance of continuous provision in an environment where they are familiar, allowing children to follow their interests in play to refine their skills. Contributing enhanced provision to the continuous provision will stimulate their minds and challenge further learning to support accurate assessment of the Child (Bradbury and Swailes, 2022).

Smidt (2015) acknowledges that Children’s meaningful learning is discovering the way the world works for themselves, rather than simply sitting and having a practitioner teach them about concepts and how their attitudes adapt to how they engage with different experiences. She does not support the idea of a tick marking system for assessment as it is a closed method for scrutinizing abilities, where through play, observations can be included as evidence of how the play contributed to their demonstration of learned skills and abilities and their learning journeys should be celebrated.

Howard et al. (2013) have esteemed play as a primary factor in monitoring children’s progress. They have provided evidence that suggests play is what children visualize as play, where they experience enjoyment which strengthens their concentration toward learning new skills. This establishes solving problems with confidence and self-esteem which are the roots of supporting all areas of development. Using this evidence, they have advocated play as an essential tool for observation and assessment. Getting a full picture of their current level of development should be an assessment that covers a range of activities and experiences and should be continuous until every question about a child’s abilities is answered with evidence through different methods of observation. They have also highlighted the significance of observing children through play and whether any delays in development need to be investigated through further assessment to ensure the best possible support is provided by adults and the environment. Alongside the information about a child’s family, background, and cultural beliefs, observation and assessment can be significant to aid an adult’s reflection of how their practice and provision of the environment are facilitating children’s development requirements. Valerie Daniel raises an important concern that there may be barriers encountered by children to education and that professionals are required to assess if play opportunities are being approached by all of the children and to overcome any barriers to ensure equal opportunities for holistic development for all (Bradbury and Swailes, 2022). The Welsh Government (2014) has recommended that specialized provision would be offered to children with disabilities and multi-cultural resources should be offered to celebrate diversity, promote well-being, and ensure equality in outcomes. Chan, A (2019) has defined New Zealand as a nation that is “super-diverse” with people from all over the world as inhabitants. They endorse the celebration of cultures and their native languages that

should be cherished through learning and set an admirable example worldwide in supporting the emotional well-being of children as individuals.

Piaget carried out observations on children himself to support his theory of how children's minds operate in comparison with adults. He believed that babies are born with a natural desire to interact with others and how this supports overall learning and the increase of experience and activities allows a child to develop new behaviours to what they perceive as play (Aubrey and Riley, 2022).

Through observation and assessment, they can evaluate children's attitudes toward play and how it changes when adults are involved or observing from afar. Howard and McInnes (2013) suggest that children can demonstrate through verbal or non-verbal communication when they require support from adults in their play and that it is essential for practitioners to be attuned to these cues so they are not interfering in the process. This can be to make decisions and solve problems by asking the correct open-ended questions. This ensures that both Children and practitioners attain an element of control in the learning and that practitioners can achieve a deeper insight into Children's learning processes.

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